

UNCLASSIFIED

**Statement of Dr. Mara E. Karlin
Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities
Before the
House Armed Services Committee (HASC)
“Engagement with Allies and Partners”
March 1, 2022
Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2118**

Introduction

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify before you today on the Department of Defense’s approach to engagement with our allies and partners through security cooperation. The United States is at a pivotal moment to ensure the trust of our allies and build relationships with our partners to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. Along with our allies and partners, we confront unprecedented challenges to our security, including the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) global ambitions to rival the United States and Russian aggression that threatens the territorial integrity of Europe, while we also battle historic transnational threats of climate change and a global pandemic.

One of the most important ways that we will rise to meet these challenges is by renewing a U.S. strategic advantage—our unmatched network of allies and partners. Our relationships provide us with a reservoir of strength. The forthcoming National Defense Strategy will emphasize how the Department will strengthen these alliances and partnerships to advance national security through integrated deterrence. As Secretary Austin underscores, integrated deterrence is integrating our efforts across domains and the spectrum of conflict to ensure that the Department closely cooperates with the rest of the government and our allies and partners on the most critical security challenges. Security cooperation is an important tool that helps key allies and partners strengthen their defense and enhances our ability to rely on one another in a time of need.

The Department of Defense has learned from large scale assistance programs that for lasting impact, a comprehensive engagement plan involves more than training and equipping. Resilient partnerships thrive when values and deeds align; security cooperation aims to uphold that approach. Key planning assumptions, such as understanding power dynamics in fragile states and ensuring the technology and capability we provide can be absorbed, maintained, and sustained by the recipient without capture or commitment are the basics; to fully realize our shared interests, assistance must align with our strategic objectives and include foundational aspects. On the last point, we aim to help partners with not only specific capabilities, but also with institutional integrity and an ability to promote our shared values, notably the promotion and protection of human rights, and good governance and legitimacy of the security sector.

To be sure, the degree of partnership should not be measured by the quantity of security cooperation programs, but rather by their quality, including transparency and effectiveness of security cooperation and assistance. Importantly, we are building a culture of learning and adaptation, drawing on lessons from program successes as well as from programs that did not have the desired impact, including in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. We are building a learning agenda and integrating it into decision processes, and measuring program impact in a way that assesses real change, rather than counting our own inputs into programs as successes in themselves. We seek to

UNCLASSIFIED

confront painful lessons head-on, and avoid the fallacy of sunk costs by ruthlessly prioritizing programs that are strategic and setting appropriately limited expectations for programs that provide more of a tactical advantage. Through this approach, we can unlock the comparative advantages our partners and allies bring and collectively work together to meet our shared objectives.

A key aspect of the success of the security cooperation enterprise is the collaboration among the offices involved in the policy and strategic alignment of security cooperation, including the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), the Defense Security Cooperation University, and the Institute for Security Governance, all of which oversee implementation. As a part of our most recent reorganization, we brought DSCA under the umbrella of Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities in Policy to facilitate better collaboration and coordination within DOD and with external partners. Success requires teamwork, and I can assure you that our entire team is focused on embracing it.

The Department's Approach to Security Cooperation

The Department's thinking on security cooperation has evolved over time and greatly benefited from Congressional reforms that streamlined our authorities. Five years ago, Congress enacted unprecedented legislation empowering the Department to support allies and partners through a consolidated range of Title 10 U.S. Code security cooperation authorities designed to advance U.S. interests and with full coordination of the Department of State.

In doing so, the message was clear – security cooperation should be deliberate and holistic. It should evolve based on consistent learning and reflect the values the United States stands for. Today our cooperation with partners includes military-to-military engagements, planning and training with foreign forces, support to operations, capacity building, education and training activities, humanitarian assistance activities, and robust exercises with key partners.

While the Department has implemented these reforms through meaningful improvements to security cooperation, more remains to be done. To seize the opportunity for meaningful change, we are focusing on three priority areas: prioritizing who and what we invest in; focusing on sustainable impact; and adopting a holistic, integrated approach to how we execute security cooperation programs.

Who and What We Invest In

I'll begin with who and what we will invest in. First, we will focus our global assets and resources to safeguard the most pressing concerns held by allies and partners who play critical roles in our shared security. The Department's invigorated focus on tailored allied and partner roles is one of the hallmarks of our evolving approach.

The way we approach security cooperation with states on the PRC's and Russia's periphery fundamentally differs from how we employ security cooperation elsewhere. Here, our approach emphasizes building resilience and capability to counter coercive or revisionist activity.

By contrast, when we look to the rest of the world, the Department wants to cultivate select security partners who can appropriately and effectively be regional security anchors, especially during crises.

By leveraging these approaches, we will be able to identify, export, and implement those capabilities that shape the strategic calculus and allow us increased operational flexibility. Whether the vehicle is

Title 10 security cooperation, State's foreign military sales, or co-development, we will work to provide critical capabilities with allies and partners in a way that makes a real difference. This requires employing the full security cooperation toolkit including engagement tools, capacity building, planning, training, exercising, professional military education, and our regional centers in each area of responsibility.

Sustainable Impact

For each of these investments, we will emphasize the tangible change that will happen as a result of our efforts, and keep our focus on a sustained impact that outlasts the particular investment. This requires robust assessment, monitoring, and evaluation. We will no longer be satisfied with measuring inputs or outputs, but rather we will take a longer view of the way our partners can sustain capabilities we provide. To this end, we are adopting rigorous learning, encouraging our workforce and partners to identify past pitfalls to draw out what success looks like in security cooperation and tailor it to the partner's context. This learning will be supported by objectives that ensure our efforts are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and anchored in a time frame, ensuring the partner's sustainability of our programs. With the forthcoming National Defense Strategy, the Department will be explicit in theater prioritization and provide further insight on investing in our allies and partners.

The Department of Defense has also instituted a robust strategic evaluation agenda focused on making public key findings, conclusions, and recommendations. We are working every day to find ways to quantify, interpret, and evaluate return on investment with our security cooperation dollars. Currently, strategic evaluations span the effectiveness of maritime security, institutional capacity building, the State Partnership Program, the Counter-ISIL Train and Equip (CTEF), and State's International Professional Military Education.

Integrated Approach to How We Do Business

Third, we recognize that how we do business matters in achieving impact. We will employ an integrated approach to partnership that includes longer-term thinking and a whole-of-government effort to achieve sustained and resilient partnership, consideration of the elements within our control and our partner's control that will determine whether the investment is effective, and consideration of external threats and third parties that may compromise the investment.

Security cooperation programs often fall short when they do not take into account higher order questions of mission, organizational structure, and personnel. We are building our tools to address these issues with partners by improving our institutional capacity and our dialogue with partners, and making tough choices when partners are not willing to make critical changes. This is especially relevant for sustainability: for ensuring that our partnerships are resilient to shocks and stresses and can endure well past the day when we are consistently investing in them.

We continue to invest in the professionalization of our security cooperation workforce by requiring increasingly rigorous training. We are investing in the concept of institutionalizing the defense diplomacy role the Department's defense representatives in embassies play, ensuring that the partnerships they promote are consistent with our national security interests and values.

UNCLASSIFIED

What ultimately sets apart the United States in an environment of strategic competition are the values we represent. Our ability to maintain and continue to set a high bar for human rights, gender equity and equality, humanitarian affairs, and rule of law—including civilian oversight of the military—is a critical tool we can leverage to help our partners meet their goals and advance those shared values. In particular, we prioritize human rights vetting and compliance with the Leahy law. Doing so is both a moral and strategic imperative.

We also take our responsibility in the humanitarian sector very seriously, as we play an important supporting role in the interagency in supporting civil authorities in countries facing crises. Whether it is managing crisis response capacity building under the Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, Assistance and Civic Aid (OHDACA) account, employing Foreign Disaster Relief, or maintaining Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA), the Department is committed to supporting our partners' efforts to provide humanitarian services to their civilian populace. During our recent reorganization within the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Policy), we have merged the offices of Stability and Humanitarian Affairs and Security Cooperation to form a new Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Global Partnerships. This shift deliberately integrated humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and human rights with the existing processes related to security cooperation to emphasize the centrality of these areas of defense cooperation that benefit allies and partners in need. Women, Peace and Security; civilian protection and atrocity prevention; and respect for the rule of law also fall into this issue set. This integration will help us look more holistically at the needs and challenges our partners and their diverse populations face, particularly when those needs can spiral into crises that spill outside the country's borders.

Of course, none of this is possible without close collaboration with our interagency partners. We rely heavily on our colleagues at the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to achieve the effects we need to achieve, whether supplementing and coordinating security programs through structured diplomatic and military engagement, or ensuring that security cooperation fits into broader foreign policy goals of preventing conflict and maintaining international peace and security.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, I began by sharing with you how the U.S. network of alliances and partnerships is a strategic advantage that competitors cannot match. I conclude by sharing that this advantage is not a given. It requires active involvement by the entire U.S. Government, listening to partners' concerns and contexts, and taking a thoughtful and deliberate approach to how we employ our resources to meet our priorities. We must carefully make cross-regional, cross-priority tradeoffs in order to leverage our strategic advantage most effectively. That is facilitated by good strategy, good policy, and close partnership between the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and Congress. I appreciate your leadership on this critical issue and thank you for the opportunity to share our vision for engagement with allies and partners through security cooperation.